



Biometrics Task Force And Navy Team for Success

BIOMETRICS
TASK FORCE

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Last year the U.S. Navy began using biometrics to help identify persons of interest aboard commercial vessels. Biometric data in the form of fingerprints can allow positive identification of an individual and prevent successful use of false identity documents. U.S. Navy ships operating in the Central Command's (CENTCOM) Area of Responsibility (AOR) have the capability to collect and forward biometric data from potential terrorists for searching against databases. These operations, referred to as Expanded Maritime Interception Operations (EMIO), are part of the Navy's Vessel Boarding Search and Seizure (VBSS) program. Because of its reach to all corners of the world, EMIO is destined to play a major role in the Global War on Terror (GWOT).

The establishment of EMIO biometrics was no small achievement. It required the DoD's Biometrics Task Force (BTF) working closely with the Navy to identify biometrics collection equipment, develop data transmission standards, and help in establishing procedures. The technical arm of the BTF is the Biometrics Fusion Center (BFC), where the DoD Automated Biometric Identification System (ABIS) is located. The ABIS is a DoD database of biometric records. The BFC provides the Navy with near-real-time ABIS search results. As EMIO-capable ships are brought on-line, the BFC provides up-front coordination to register the ships prior to the Navy's submission of operational data. The BFC provided valuable assistance to the Navy in recommending EMIO biometrics collection equipment and by conducting testing to ensure compatibility with data standards required by ABIS. The BTF has made funds available to the Naval Innovation Laboratory (NaIL) to develop a next-generation EMIO collection kit for the Vessel Boarding Search and Seizure boarding parties that will be smaller, lighter, and will include more capability.

EMIO will be greatly enhanced with the addition of a wireless capability currently under development by the Navy. Wireless EMIO will permit transmission of collected biometric data from the intercepted vessel to the supporting U.S. Navy ship, which will relay the data to the BFC for searching against the ABIS. The BFC has provided significant support to the Navy's wireless initiative by conducting proof-of-concept testing with the USS Ingraham in June 2005 and through its participation in laboratory testing with Navy developers.

Dave Guerrino, the Navy's liaison to the BTF, said it is not likely EMIO would be as well established as it is today without the support provided over the years by the BTF. The BTF recognized the importance of EMIO early on and provided support during a critical time when policy was still being developed and EMIO funds were not available in the Navy. Even today the BTF continues to work closely with the Navy. EMIO training is an area that needs improvement, and BFC personnel are working with the Center for Security Forces to improve the EMIO curriculum, develop a Boarding Officer course, and help train the trainer. Mr. Guerrino added that training is a critical issue for EMIO because there are extended periods between operations, and the boarding parties need the capability, such as Computer Based Training (CBT), to refresh their earlier training.

The BTF is charged with promoting and supporting the use of biometrics throughout the DoD. EMIO is an example of a partnership between the BTF and one branch of the DoD that will result in a significant contribution to the GWOT.